

# Maintaining Classroom Discipline

Promoting Good Methods of Classroom Discipline

**H**elping students to govern their own behavior in ways that help them learn is a longstanding goal of all teachers. There are a number of ways that a teacher can promote good discipline in the classroom.

**Know school guidelines** for discipline procedures.

**Be fair, positive and consistent.** Be the kind of person young people can like and trust—firm, fair, friendly, courteous, enthusiastic and confident. Keep your sense of humor.

**Provide a list of standards** and consequences to parents and students. Make sure they are consistent with district and building policy. When in doubt, ask a colleague or your principal.

**Keep your classroom orderly.** Maintain a cheerful and attractive classroom rather than a disorderly one which might encourage disruptive behavior.

**Get to know your students.** Learn their names quickly and use them in and out of class. You will soon develop almost a sixth sense for anticipating trouble before it begins, but don't act as though you expect trouble or you will almost certainly encounter some.

**Let the students know you care.** Determine jointly with the class what is acceptable in terms of behavior and achievement and what is not. Show interest in what students say, whether or not it pertains directly to the lesson.

**Treat students with the same respect** you expect from them; keep confidences.

**Learn the meaning of terms,** especially slang, used by students.

**Begin class on time** and in a businesslike manner.

**Make learning fun.** Make education interesting and relevant to the students' lives. Poor planning and a full curriculum can provoke disruptions.

**Encourage good work,** good responses and good behavior.

**Don't threaten or use sarcasm.** Never use threats to enforce discipline. Never humiliate a child.

**Avoid arguing with students.** Discussions about class work are invaluable, but arguments can become emotional encounters.

**Be mobile,** moving around the room as students work or respond to instruction.

**Keep your voice at a normal level.** If "disaster" strikes and you trip over the wastebasket, don't be afraid to laugh.

**Grade assignments** and return them as soon as possible.

**Give reasonable assignments.** Don't use schoolwork as punishment. Give clear directions.

**Keep rules simple.** Establish as few classroom rules as possible, and keep them simple.

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## Discipline — The **LEAST** Approach.

There are several good methods of classroom discipline. One of the best is the **LEAST** Approach, developed by NEA, which helps you determine the appropriate level of involvement. If discipline problems can be handled at Step 1, there is no need to progress to Step 2, etc. Briefly, the **LEAST** Approach includes these steps:

•**Leave it alone.**

If the event is a brief and minor disturbance that is unlikely to occur again, leave it be.

•**End the action indirectly.**

When learning is disrupted or someone may get hurt, let the student(s) involved know you are aware of the inappropriate activity with a facial expression, a body gesture, or a quiet action such as walking toward the student(s) or calling the student(s)' name(s).

•**Attend more fully.**

Secure more information from the student on who, what, when, where and why. Be objective rather than emotional.

•**Spell out directions.**

When a situation threatens to get out of hand, making learning impossible or risking harm to someone, clearly explain to the student(s) involved the consequences of his/her actions and your intent to follow through.

•**Treat student progress.**

Record what happened, when, where, who was involved, what you did, and who witnessed the incident.

## What if I “blow” the first week?

If you “blow” the first week, don't worry. Just re-evaluate your rules and policies, tell the class you're making some changes, and be consistent from then on.

•**Expect the unexpected.**

Schedules will be changed without warning and unanticipated events will occur. Be flexible in responding to the unexpected; ask your colleagues for suggestions on how to deal with situations like the following.

•**What will you do if:**

- it rains at recess time?
- your class arrives too early at the cafeteria?
- a student tells you her pet died?
- a student tells you she is pregnant?
- a child wets his pants?
- a student is verbally abusive?
- a parent is angry and unreasonable?
- a student refuses to do what you ask?
- you have no textbooks?
- a student falls asleep?
- a student cuts her head falling out of her desk?

- you are called to the office in the middle of class?
- non-English speaking students are assigned to your class?
- a student has a seizure or goes into a coma?

•**Be fair to your students.**

Here are some ways to help you win the respect of your students:

- Be consistent in application of discipline and just in your requirements and assignments.
- Don't refuse to let a student tell you his or her side of the situation. Be willing to consider mitigating circumstances.
- Don't talk about the misdeeds of students except to those who have a right to know. Don't openly compare one pupil to another.
- Apologize if you've treated a student unjustly.
- Make sure punishments are appropriate for the misbehavior, and explain to the student why he or she is being punished.

## Handling Classroom Conflicts

Here are a few practical suggestions for dealing with an angry student in the classroom who is defying your authority and is out of control:

- Do not raise your voice.
- Try to remain calm and rational.
- Do not touch an agitated or angry student.
- Try to keep the student seated. In many instances, this is impossible. You can only suggest the student remain seated so that he might explain to you what is wrong.
- Be reassuring to the student as well as the rest of the class. Explain the importance of protecting every student's right to learn. Talk about options for resolving the conflict.
- Send another student for help. The student should be told to go to the nearest office to summon assistance from the administration.
- After the incident is over, immediately document everything that happened. This documentation should include time, name(s) of student(s) involved, a brief description of the events that occurred, and any information that pertains to the student(s) or the incident. This report should be submitted to the administration. You also should keep a copy in case of a future conference with parents or school administrators regarding the incident.